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ABSTRACT

This monograph reviews the elements of successful associates programs that institutional and volunteer leaders may consider in mobilizing individual constituents who are priority gift prospects. Associates programs have recently been established at a number of institutions of higher education; they suggest a relationship of prestige and distinction and are aimed at the affluent and influential citizen. Their major purpose is to promote fund raising and to create a powerful inner constituency through which the institution can more effectively communicate. Elements of a successful program include: (1) a clear definition of purpose; (2) membership criteria that challenge the top level of the institution's consistency; (3) identification of prospects based on thorough research; (4) personal enlistment of members; (5) active demonstration of program sponsorship by individual members; (6) effective printed materials; (7) the demonstration of chief executive leadership in program activities, communications, and membership cultivation and solicitation; and (8) a qualified staff and adequate budget support. A list of programs at selected institutions is included in the appendix. (AF)

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# Program For Priority Prospects

by DAVID C. BERNER

Guide to associates  
of merit in educational  
administration for trustees,  
administrative officers,  
of voluntary leaders.







ED054722

# Program for Priority Prospects

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by DAVID C. FERNER

A guide to associates programs in educational institutions for trustees, administrative officers, and volunteer leaders.

## DEFINITION

*Associates Program:* A special and selective method for relating the institution to top priority individuals, requiring a large annual and/or deferred gift commitment for membership, encouraging a sophisticated and close identification with the institution, fostering their help in advancing the institution in significant ways.

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## Program For Priority Prospects

### INTRODUCTION

This monograph is designed to serve as a guide for members of governing boards, chief executives, staff administrators and volunteer leaders of educational institutions who, in their desire to accelerate the advancement of those institutions, are inaugurating, or are attempting to invigorate, special programs intended to involve their priority support prospects.

If there has been any new magic in educational fund raising lately, it may well be found, at least in part, in the number and variety of imaginative plans, known in the generic sense as "associates programs," which have been established recently at many institutions across the country. These programs have been given many labels, as indicated by the partial listing shown on page 19, but inevitably the specific name chosen for a program by an institution, and readily identified with it, will suggest a relationship of prestige and distinction.

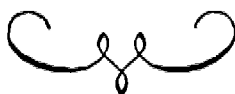
The magic of the associates program consists not only of the commitment of financial support it is able to enlist, but also of the more important interaction it produces between the institution and its goals, on the one hand, and persons of influence and affluence, on the other. By its nature, the associates program creates an inner constituency of great potential to which the institution may communicate its plans and aspirations in a direct and personal way. Through such communication, the institution creates a climate for greater understanding, increases the possibility for a more favorable response to its future needs and stimulates the readiness of outstanding individuals to accept greater responsibility for its welfare in various capacities.

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This guide refers only to associates programs which invite the membership of individuals, not those that include organizational, corporate or church memberships. In addition, the guide does not concern itself with the "century club" or "dean's list" technique which seeks to identify and honor annual contributors of \$100 or less. The associates program is aimed at a much higher gift level, and hopes to achieve that level through a more sophisticated program of activities and involvement.

In one sense, the associates program represents the application of capital gift fund raising methods to the annual fund. The priority prospects — the top 10% — must be considered as candidates for both large annual gifts for operations, as well as for unusual gifts from time to time for capital purposes. It must be accepted that constituents are not equal in their capacity to give or to lead, and to the degree that institutional management and staff administrators recognize this fact, and accordingly adjust their advancement planning, so will the achievement of institutional goals be accelerated.



### PURPOSES OF ASSOCIATES PROGRAMS

A survey of associates programs, and experience in consulting and managing them, have indicated the following as the most customary purposes they are expected to serve in institutional advancement.

*Recognition and Honor:* To recognize and honor individuals for a demonstrated unusual interest in and financial support of the

institution, by identifying them as members of a select association of adherents.

*Information and Understanding:* To provide opportunities for a special support group to become better informed about the purpose, program and plans of the institution.

*Involvement and Awareness:* To broaden the involvement of representative leaders from the professional, industrial and community sectors in a continuous awareness of the importance of the institution in higher education, and of higher education's vital role in the future of the nation.

*Resources and Services:* To encourage individuals to acquaint themselves with, and avail themselves of, the services and resources of the institution, including the expertise of its faculty and administration.

*Ambassadorship:* To stimulate and prepare individuals to become effective ambassadors for the institution in the social and business communities, and by their sponsorship to increase understanding and support of the institution.

*Leadership Development:* To encourage and prepare individuals to fill a variety of responsible roles — as trustees, advisors and volunteer leaders of special advancement activities.

*Gift Support:* To create, or maintain, a firm base of continuing gift support as a dependable source of annual income upon which the institution can rely to strengthen and enrich its regular educational operation, and to instill a readiness on the part of select individuals to provide the support for other purposes that are of importance to the institution and those associated with it.

### MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

Criteria for membership in associates programs vary among institutions, but they are usually determined by the special needs of an institution and the nature of its constituency. Most successful programs have adopted one, or several, of the following standards as a basis for membership.

#### *Annual Gift*

The most common standard for associates program membership is a minimum annual gift, usually at the \$1,000 level, which the prospective member is expected to make. Occasionally, two membership categories exist, such as the "Founding" membership, where the member is expected to give \$5,000 and up annually, and the "Regular" membership, where the donor gives a minimum of \$1,000 but less than \$5,000 annually.

Some institutions request a pledge of a minimum amount to be paid over a specific number of years. For example: A \$10,000 pledge payable annually at \$1,000 or more; A minimum of \$1,000 per year for five years.

By adopting an annual gift standard for membership, institutions stress the recurring need for gift income and the continuing leadership of associates. Usually, prospective members are encouraged, if not required, to sign a pledge or statement-of-intent indicating a minimum gift commitment each year, or for a specific number of years, while reserving the right to alter the pledge as circumstances dictate. Associates program experience has shown that most new members each year will continue membership for one or more additional years. If the institution meets the challenge of keeping the relationship an interesting and rewarding one, continued participation is highly probable.

While institutions use associates program gifts for a variety of purposes, they stress the importance of the unrestricted gift for current operations. Some institutions require all gifts to their associates program be unrestricted. Others have designated associates gifts for a single expendable purpose, such as faculty salaries or student scholarships. And still others provide a list of purposes for which associates may designate their gifts, including the unrestricted.

It is important in permitting the designation of associates gifts that the restriction be limited to one or more of the basic or specific needs of the institution, not to a special-interest project that pleases the donor but encumbers the institution. Special-interest gifts, if ever acceptable, should be considered only as *in addition* to the requisite associates gift.

#### *Deferred Gift*

Some institutions include a deferred gift commitment as acceptable for membership, either as an alternative or in addition to a current gift. For example: an irrevocable charitable trust may be established for at least \$15,000; a life insurance policy with a face value of \$10,000 or more may be irrevocably assigned to the institution; a letter stating that a bequest of \$25,000 or more has been written into the will may be submitted.

Other programs, while not encouraging a specific deferred gift qualification for membership, often suggest to members the opportunities available in their estate planning to perpetuate their current institutional interest and support.

Institutions which provide for and stimulate deferred gift commitments in their associates programs usually accelerate both current and deferred gift income. Members who join originally on the basis of a deferred gift arrangement, often begin making annual gifts as

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well. Also, the reverse situation frequently occurs in institutions steadily promoting deferred giving within their associates programs and throughout their constituencies.

### *Honorary Memberships*

In a few instances, an institution will provide for honorary memberships in its associates program in order to give recognition to individuals who have made special contributions of service to the institution, or who have enhanced its reputation by their achievements. However, most institutions consciously avoid honorary or *ex officio* membership, requiring the same qualifications for all members.

Since individuals who might be considered as candidates for honorary membership often have the capacity for meeting the regular membership criteria, it would appear advisable to restrict any such honorary category to the minimum in order to maintain the integrity of the program's basic support mission.

## MEMBERSHIP ENLISTMENT

### *First, Research*

Institutions inaugurating or sustaining associates programs must create and maintain accurate and up-to-date files of prospects rated as having qualifications for membership. A valid prospect list is the product of continuing constituency research carried out by administrative staff. Institutions that conduct careful research and have special prospect information files constantly maintained as a function of development, are able to identify associates program prospects readily, and can quickly supply reliable information for volunteer leaders when necessary.



*Prospect Sources*

While a few institutions limit associates program membership to alumni, the majority include individuals who are related to the institution in a variety of ways. In theory, an institution should be able to anticipate that at least one percent of its total constituency will have the potential for making an annual gift of \$1,000 or more. Obviously, institutions with very wealthy constituencies can expect more — perhaps three to five per cent. Possible prospect sources include these:

- Trustees and former trustees
- Alumni (degree and non-degree)
- Parents of students and alumni
- Business, community or church leaders
- Friends and relatives of trustees,  
alumni, students, faculty and staff
- Honorary degree recipients
- Members of advisory councils
- Faculty and staff

*Introduction by Example*

To introduce a new associates program properly, trustees and volunteer leaders *must* set an example for all other prospects by their demonstrated enthusiasm and financial support of the program. If they do, the approach to other prospects, particularly those outside the immediate institutional family, then becomes a satisfying and productive enterprise. If they do not, however, there may ensue a general impersonalization of the program, characterized by a reliance

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on direct mail fronted by "paper" chairmen, and superficial communication with and involvement of associates.

Of all of the considerations that should go into the planning of an associates program, the extent to which an institution can expect the backing and support of its top leadership is perhaps most important.

### *Three Enlistment Procedure Imperatives*

Experience in advising associates programs has demonstrated three major imperatives for enlisting associates:

1. Prospects should be approached in person, usually on a one-to-one basis between peers, and with the knowledge that in many instances more than one visit and discussion will be necessary to secure a large gift. Letters are helpful, but only to confirm a discussion, not as a substitute for one. Letters alone may convey a lack of urgency and importance to the program.
2. Individuals with the capacity to give at the associates level should never be prejudged negatively as to their probable response. One never knows what an individual will do if sufficiently challenged by the right person at the right time for the right reason. Awareness of an individual's attitude toward the institution is of course important, but it should not necessarily preclude invitation to join a new venture.
3. Invite candidates for membership according to their capacities, from the largest to the smallest. Seek leadership gifts first, above the minimum required, as a standard and inspiration for the rest that will follow. Where two levels of membership are involved, secure the upper category first.

## MEMBERSHIP AND DOLLAR GOALS

Institutions often establish specific goals for the number of members to be enlisted and the amount of dollars to be given. Presuming that these are realistic goals, and whether published or not, they serve to strengthen the case for the program as prospects are approached, and they act as incentives for volunteer leaders and staff administrators. Such goals are established on the basis of one or more of the following factors: (1) financial planning and budgetary needs; (2) potential in the constituency; (3) analysis of what is achievable; (4) assessment of what represents a real challenge.

### *Relationship to Annual Giving*

When associates program gifts are designated for current operations, they represent the leadership gift phase of an institution's over-all annual fund. Experience has shown that gifts by associates have in many cases accounted for 50% or more of total annual giving. At some institutions they have even accounted for as high as 75% of the annual fund. Therefore, the introduction of an associates program may cause the fund to multiply faster than any other single factor.

An example of the affect of the associates program on the annual fund is illustrated on page 10. This example is based upon an annual fund constituency of 10,000 which possesses normal annual gift potential. An annual gift of \$1,000 and up is required for associates membership.



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EXAMPLE OF ANNUAL GIFT PERFORMANCE  
BEFORE AND AFTER INTRODUCTION OF ASSOCIATES PROGRAM

	Two years before associates program	One year before	First year of associates program	Second year	Third year
No. donors \$1,000 up	4	8	25	50	100
Total amt. given by donors \$1,000 up	\$ 5,000	\$10,000	\$ 50,000	\$100,000	\$200,000
Total no. donors to annual fund	3,000	3,400	3,800	4,000	4,200
Total amt. given to annual fund	\$75,000	\$90,000	\$120,000	\$190,000	\$300,000
% increase in amt. over pre- vious year	—	20%	33%	58%	58%
% of total no. donors who gave \$1,000 up	.1%	.2%	.7%	1.3%	2.4%
% of total annual amt. given by donors \$1,000 up	7%	11%	42%	53%	67%

### SPONSORING COMMITTEE

Associates programs are often organized under the leadership of a sponsoring group. This may take the form of a chairman and a small number of associates who agree to actively promote the program, or it may be a more formal organization with a full complement of officers, plus executive, program and membership committees. In either case, sponsors insure continuity of program. Naturally, sponsors must be members of the associates program themselves.

Regardless of the organizational structure, the sponsors or associates program leadership serve to accomplish the following:

1. Communication about the promotion of the objectives of the associates program.
2. Steady increase of membership by annually selecting individuals who qualify for membership, inviting them to join and obtaining their membership gifts.
3. Planning and sponsoring of a program which will maintain a close and informed relationship between associates and the institution.

### ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNICATIONS

Successful associates programs communicate with, involve and reward members on the highest possible level. Associates generally are inspired and rewarded by a sincere attempt to relate their particular interests to institutional programs and people. They respond favorably to special invitations to meet with trustees and executives of the institution for sharing and discussing problems and opportunities. As friends of higher education, they are interested in the larger issues of education and the relationship of these issues with the business world and society in general.

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Associates usually take pride in their special identification with the institution. While some may wish to remain anonymous, the majority will not be adverse to a public recognition as benefactors of higher education. Many institutions invest too little time in cultivating prospective associates, and then even less time with those who become contributing members. Below are listed some activities and communications which serve to maintain and increase the interest of associates:

1. *Annual Dinner*

Perhaps the most common activity, the annual dinner for associates provides the opportunity to address the members on a topic of great scope and importance by a person or persons of outstanding significance. This event may include the presentation of a special award to one or more individuals who have made a contribution of lasting significance to the institution and society. Such recognition symbolizes the concept of service to which associates are dedicated. The dinner also provides the chairman of the program and the institution's chief executive an opportunity to make their annual reports to associates and to announce future plans.

2. *Associates Day*

This is a day scheduled each year when members are formally invited to visit the campus, attend classes, meet faculty and students, tour facilities, hear reports from administrators, and have dinner with the chief executive and trustees.

3. *Associates Seminars or Roundtables*

This is another opportunity for the chief executive, administrators and selected faculty to discuss educational plans, problems and opportunities frankly with associates. This may



be done once a year in connection with Associates Day, or three, four or more times a year during lunch or dinner, alternating between the campus and the home or club of one of the members.

4. *Individual Interest*

Each associate can be invited to express an interest in some particular phase of the institution's program — academic, administrative, student, research — and a conscientious effort can be made to serve that interest by offering an opportunity for him or her to acquire further information, participate in programs, or be an appropriate part of planning and development. Some institutions have involved faculty and students in donor cultivation as a response to special interests of specific individuals.

5. *President's, Chancellor's or Headmaster's Letter*

This is a personal communication to members written several times a year to inform them of institutional progress and activities during that year. Usually the chief executive addresses himself to only one or two topics in each letter. It serves as a kind of "insiders" newsletter, individually typed with personalized salutations and handwritten signatures.

6. *Faculty Publications*

From time to time a book may be written by a member of the faculty that would make an appropriate gift to associates. A book plate, especially designed for this purpose, can be affixed and a covering letter enclosed from the chief executive. The faculty author autographs the book.

7. *Significant Publications on Higher Education*

At times, a book, report or speech of great significance to

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higher education can be identified as important for members to read. The special book plate can be sent as a gift with a covering letter from the chief executive.

##### 8. *Recognition Certificates, Plaques and Commemorative Objects*

Upon joining the associates program, the individual member may receive a certificate or plaque as tangible recognition of his generosity and commitment to the institution. Usually the institution expresses this form of appreciation for associates only during their first year of membership, rather than repeating it each year. The member's name and first year of membership is inscribed and the certificate is signed by the institution's chief executive, associates program chairman and governing board chairman. Other commemorative objects may include medallions, silver trays and chairs. When expressed with quality and taste, members take pride in such recognition.

#### PRINTED MATERIALS

Institutions developing associates programs usually prepare special presentations for membership enlistment. Many institutions print a brochure of a quality commensurate with the affluence of the membership, importance of the program and accomplishments realized or expected. The length, elaborateness and cost of these brochures vary greatly, as does the effectiveness of design and copy.

Some institutions inaugurate associates programs by using a type-written statement prepared in prospectus form for submission to each prospect when he is called upon. This method has proven especially effective in enlisting charter members. After the program has started, the printed brochure may be prepared a year or two later, as much to recognize and honor associates as to enlist additional members.

Whatever their form, successful associates program materials include the following elements:

1. Purpose of the program.
2. Membership criteria.
3. Case for the institution and program.
4. Statement-of-intent or gift transmittal form and return envelope.
5. Current members and sponsoring committee.
6. Governing board members.

### *The Case*

The case is the feature part of the program material. Institutions often neglect to state the case for their associates programs, either convincingly or at all, by word of mouth or in print. To assist trustees, volunteers and institutional executives in articulating the program and interpreting it to others, and to strengthen the enlistment function, staff directors must prepare a statement of the case for the associates program. Effective associates program case statements include the following subjects:

1. The importance of education in our society and the distinctive role the particular institution serves in the educational spectrum.
2. The institution as a deserving object of philanthropic support — accomplishments, services, qualities, goals.
3. The importance of having a corps of influential individuals who are well informed about the institution and who can interpret it to others.
4. The importance of recurring gift support for current operations.
5. The purpose of gifts by associates and why they are designated for that purpose.

6. The financial nature and facts of the institution — budget, endowment, sources of income, expenses, forecasts.

### EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

Based upon the principle that successful educational advancement programs are trustee-inspired, volunteer-led and staff-serviced, the roles of the chief executive (president, chancellor or headmaster) and his staff are critical in sustaining effective associates programs.

#### *Chief Executive as Catalyst*

Given the high degree of influence and affluence among prospects and members in associates programs, priority time and attention is required from the chief executive and members of the governing board. It is through these prime constituents that they are able to realize many of their institutional goals. The chief executive serves as a powerful catalyst in inaugurating and sustaining associates programs as follows:

1. Insistence upon a meaningful program and challenging goals.
2. Interpretation of the program to the governing board and enlistment of their sponsorship and leadership.
3. Enlistment of a chairman of the program, often a member of the governing board.
4. Enlistment of a number of individuals into associate membership.
5. Invitation to associates to attend special events and activities and participation in them.
6. Personal, regular communication with associates.

#### *Staff Service*

Associates programs are likely to succeed when qualified staff and sufficient budget support are available. Usually the program is staffed

by the institution's development or fund raising office. Often alumni, public relations and publications administrators serve key roles in identifying prospects and preparing program materials and events. In small institutions, the chief development or advancement officer himself may administer the associates program as one of his responsibilities. In larger institutions, particularly universities with sizable constituencies, an administrator and clerical assistance may be assigned full-time for the associates program. Almost always he is a member of the development team and reports directly to the chief development or advancement officer in the institution.

Experience teaches us that institutions spend too small a portion of staff time and budget on major prospects, such as associates, and too high a portion on the total constituency. As a minimum requirement for success, staff should perform the following roles in creating and managing associates programs:

1. Recommendations for the program — purpose, membership qualifications, activities, communications.
2. Identification and assessment of prospects through research.
3. Preparation of program statements and membership enlistment materials.
4. Coordination of prospect assignments and follow-up of membership solicitation.
5. Reporting of progress and accomplishments.
6. Preparation of special communications and events for associates.
7. Administration of membership pledges, gift receipts and acknowledgements, directly or through gift recording office.
8. Maintenance of program and membership records, directly or through central records office.

### SUMMARY

Reviewed in this monograph were the elements of successful associates programs which institutional and volunteer leaders may consider in mobilizing individual constituents who are priority gift prospects. Associates programs are most likely to succeed when they encompass the following characteristics:

1. Purposes are clearly defined and communicated, ranging from recognition to involvement to gift support for basic institutional needs.
2. Membership criteria challenge the top level of the institution's constituency.
3. Identification of prospects is based on a thorough search of all possible sources.
4. Governing board and volunteer leadership and large gift support are demonstrated early in the program.
5. Members are enlisted in person and according to capacity to give.
6. Program sponsorship is actively demonstrated by individual members.
7. Program activities and communications relate individual interests to institutional goals and programs and aim at further appreciation of the institution and reward to the individual.
8. Printed materials argue the case for the program and the institution.
9. Chief executive leadership is demonstrated in program activities and communications and membership cultivation and solicitation.
10. Qualified staff and adequate budget support are assigned.



## APPENDIX A

### ACTION STEPS\*

1. Acceptance and sponsorship by governing board.
2. Enlistment of board and major prospects.
3. Appointment of program chairman.
4. Appointment of sponsoring committee.
5. Preparation of program materials, including case statement.
6. Identification of, and research on, prospects.
7. Assignment of prospects by membership level.
8. Issuance of regular assignment and membership reports.
9. Planning for, and implementation of, continuing program of involvement and communication between associates and institution.

## APPENDIX B

### BASIC ERRORS TO BE AVOIDED

1. Setting membership standards too low at start.
2. Diminishing membership standards or allowing exceptions.
3. Permitting renewals to lapse by inattention.
4. Not identifying prospects because of inadequate research.
5. Accepting non-participation by trustees and chief executive.
6. Not soliciting capable prospects because of prejudgment of their probable response.
7. Substituting direct mail for personal solicitation.
8. Substituting staff for volunteers in enlistment visits.
9. Ignoring need for convincing and continued communication with prospects.
10. Overlooking need for recurring programs of events and activities to insure continuing involvement of members.

## APPENDIX C

### PROGRAMS AT SELECTED INSTITUTIONS

Austin College \_\_\_\_\_ The Daniel Baker Society  
Babson Institute \_\_\_\_\_ The Babson Fellows

\*Exact order of implementation may vary.

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Bard College _____	The President's Council
Beaver College _____	The Coronet Society
Beloit College _____	The Chapin Society
Blair Academy _____	The John I. Blair Society
Bloomfield College _____	The President's Council
Connecticut College _____	Alumnae Laurels
Converse College _____	The Towers of Converse
Cooper Union _____	Peter Cooper Society of The Advancement Societies
Cornell University _____	The Tower Club
Finch College _____	The President's Council
Hofstra University _____	The Hofstra Associates
Lehigh University _____	The Asa Packer Associates
The Masters School _____	The Dobbs Colleagues
McGill University _____	The McGill Associates
Michigan Technological University _____	The President's Club
Mount Holyoke College _____	The Cornerstone Club
Muhlenberg College _____	The Henry Melchior Muhlenberg Society
New York Military Academy _____	The Academy Associates
New York University _____	The Albert Gallatin Associates
Newark Academy _____	Headmaster's Club
Northwestern University _____	The Johns Evans Club
Ohio State University _____	The President's Club
Oklahoma State University _____	The President's Club
Randolph-Macon College _____	The President's Council
Randolph-Macon Woman's College _____	The Conway Club
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute _____	Patroons of Rensselaer
	The Rensselaer Associates
Sarah Lawrence College _____	Sarah Lawrence Associates
Skidmore College _____	Friends of the Presidents
Sweet Briar College _____	The Boxwood Circle
Temple University _____	Diamond Associates
Thiel College _____	The Thiel College Board of Fellows
	The William A. Passavant Society
University of Michigan _____	The President's Club
University of Pennsylvania _____	Benjamin Franklin Associates
Washington University _____	The William Greenleaf Eliot Society
Westminster Choir College _____	The Westminster Choir College Associates
Whittier College _____	The Whittier College Associates



